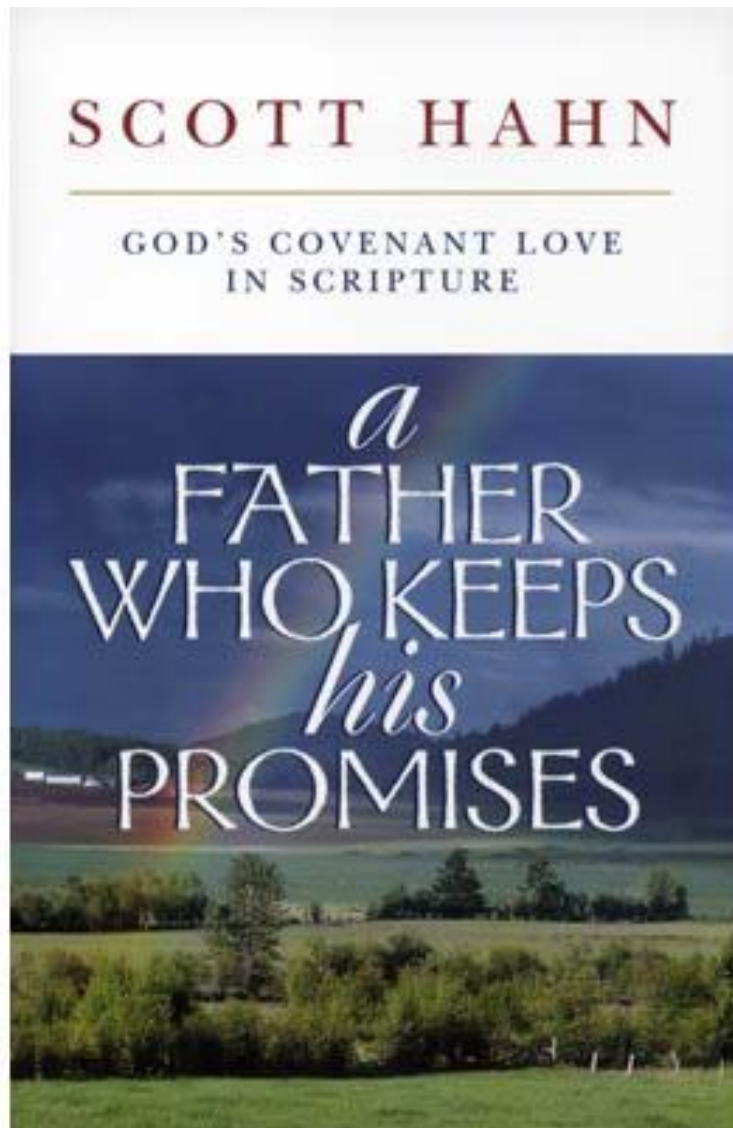


A Summary of A Father Who Keeps His Promises by Scott Hahn



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Ann Arbor: Charis Books, 1998

ISBN: 0-89283-829-9

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About the Author

Scott Hahn, a popular speaker, teacher, and personality, was born in 1957. He married Kimberly in 1979, and has six homeschooled children. He triple-majored at Grove City College, PA, in 1979, and went on to receive his Masters of Divinity from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1982 and his Ph.D. in Biblical Theology from Marquette University, WI in 1995. He was a youth and pastoral minister and Professor of Theology at Chesapeake Theological Seminary before being ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1982. He entered the Catholic Church in 1986. He has taught Theology and Scripture at Franciscan University of Steubenville since 1990. He has written numerous articles and about a dozen books.

General Overview

The story of the Old and New Testaments is, at heart, the long story of God's covenant with mankind. Though man has been stubborn and often rejected this covenant, God has always been faithful. He has "upped the ante" with subsequent covenants, always leading to the final revelation of his New Covenant: Jesus Christ Himself, who fulfills all the covenants in the Old Testament with His Incarnation, suffering, passion, death, and resurrection. This book concentrates on the Father's Old Testament covenants, in order to show (in the last and climactic chapter) exactly how Christ fulfilled God's promises to His children.

Chapter 1: KINSHIP BY COVENANT: The Master Plan for God's Family in Scripture

Following a devastating earthquake in 1989 Armenia, one father searched through rubble for hours and hours before finding his beloved son. His son, rescued with many others who were only found through the father's perseverance, said later that he had enduring faith in his father. Our faith in our Father is somewhat like that, for our Father too has unfailing love. Although even the best of human fathers have faults and weaknesses, this book is designed to get a glimpse of the awesome perfection of our Heavenly Father.

Scripture is almost too large to consume without being overwhelmed, but eventually one can map out the peak events of the mountain range of salvation history. After Dr. Hahn began to form a "mental map" of the Testaments, he was shocked to realize that God had already provided us with the means to make such a map through the Church's living Tradition and liturgy. We are to realize how much God did to prepare the world for the Incarnation. But his love is almost too demanding. This complete self-donation of ours shows us that we were not intended for this earth alone. Sin is then the refusal of divine sonship.

Scripture is not just short morality tales, nor a boring history list, but the highlights of a divine drama. The ancient Hebrew outlook on time as salvation history is really quite radical. God "writes" the world like men write words. The concept of covenant is a central thread woven throughout the sacred mystery of the Scripture. A covenant is similar to a contract, but with two primary differences: solemn oaths instead of private promises, and a gift-of-persons instead of exchange of property. Examples of modern covenants include marriage, military oaths, courtroom testimony oaths, etc. Covenants forge bonds of freedom in commitment.

One of the significant differences between the Old and New Testaments: the Old Testament covenant is mediated by sinners who can invoke covenant curses, but the New Testament is mediated by the One who fulfills the Old. Interestingly, the Latin word for "oath" is *sacramentum*. God's covenants are his message of love and familial commitment, and are wondrously permanent. God's promises were principally made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. With each successive covenant, God broadened their scope from a marital bond (Eve) to a family bond (on the ark) to a tribal bond (circumcision) to a national bond (twelve tribes at the Passover) to a kingdom's bond (David's throne) to a universal bond (Jesus' family in the Catholic Church). And what better familial example is there than the Trinity itself?

Chapter 2: CREATION COVENANT AND COSMIC TEMPLE: God's Habitat for Human

Modern interpretations of Genesis seem to neglect ancient (and therefore more correct) interpretations of the text. Literal interpretations and “myth” interpretations of the Creation account are equally neglectful of the truth by forcing Genesis to address modern problems by putting words in the author’s mouth.

The first verse of the Bible exudes the power and sovereignty of God. God’s words creatively respond to formlessness. The Creation account is very orderly: the structure is created in three days, and then the rulers of each structure are created in three days. Man and woman are specially made in God’s “image and likeness”, meaning that human life possesses great sacredness, that our work has special value, and that we are like God. In fact, God had a father-son relationship with Adam. But yet there is still a vast gulf between us and our Creator.

God gave the Sabbath to His people to be the sign of His covenant. Adam was both king and priest as a son of God. Interestingly, since man was created on day six, the Sabbath was man’s first full day: rest before work, not after. Faith before labor. The Hebrew word for “oath-swearing” literally means “to seven oneself”! The architectural images of house, palace, and temple frequently appear as well, with temple being the highest and holiest. Could the Israelites have read the Creation as God’s erection of a cosmic temple for his people? Also, Genesis 1 calls God “Elohim”, but Genesis 2 calls God “Yahweh”, a transition from cosmic meaning to personal meaning. The Garden of Eden itself is referenced as the sanctuary of the cosmic temple.

Chapter 3: SPLITTING THE ADAM: From Creation to Desecration

Adam’s name (which means “man”) performs much the same as Israel’s name: pointing to their roles as fathers. Adam was given the Garden of Eden by God, with only one big DON’T. He could eat from the tree of life, but not the tree of knowledge, lest he die (both living and dying in spirit). God then created Eve to perfectly meet Adam’s needs. The Sabbath can now be seen as the sign of two closely related covenants: between God and creation, and Adam and Eve.

In the fall, Adam acted unfaithfully as husband and priest, however, due to pride from his fear of suffering and death. Adam was not calculatedly contemptuous, nor was Eve a simpleton. The subtle serpent only addressed Eve, bypassing God’s familial structure. Adam did not contradict Satan’s bold lies, his silence speaking to his hidden fears of death. After they ate, their eyes were opened to a new reality of hostility and threat. Even though the humans broke the covenant, the Father still immediately promised a Savior (and a Woman) who would crush Satan’s head. The Father imposes the curse of suffering in order to prove His love, that the redemption would be understood through repentance. Since death is the ultimate suffering, the ultimate moment of life is the acceptance of sacrificial death: the key to unlocking the redemptive power of Christ’s death! Christ did what Adam should have done.

Chapter 4: SHAPE UP OR SHIP OUT: A Broken Covenant Renewed With Noah

Salvation history reveals sin as (literally) a broken home. The next chapter in salvation history has Cain succumbing to the deadly sin of envy on his way to murder against his very brother. Cain’s descendent, Lamech, was the first man to take two wives: also in direct violation of God’s plan for family. But Adam’s other son, Seth, began covenant worship. After this initial familial conflict, however, the Sethites began to lust after the Cainite women, and sin became institutionalized. God, unwavering in His commitment to the marriage covenant, sent the flood to wipe out all but the remaining righteous family: Noah’s.

God declared his second major covenant with Noah, to re-found God's family. The flood account is surprisingly similar to the Creation account: worlds emerging from the deep waters, the number 7, "Noah" means "rest", the divine commission to be fruitful, dominion over beasts, a new sign of the covenant, et cetera. Unfortunately, sin reappears in the form of incest by Ham, and the fruit of this is Canaan. Maternal incest became ritualized for Canaanites: the effects of sin don't end with the death of the sinner. The very name of Canaan was revolting to the Israelites. Ham's line also produced the Philistines, the Egyptians, and the Babylonians: a rogue's gallery. The elect family was through Noah's son Shem, whose descendent Abram would be chosen to be the recipient of a further covenant by achieving the impossible.

Chapter 5: HOW DO YOU SPELL BELIEF? The Faith of Father Abraham

God, surprisingly, asked a seventy-five year old man named Abram to pack up and leave his familiar surroundings for an unknown destination. More surprisingly, Abram obeyed! Three great promises followed Abram's action: land ownership and nationhood, a new name signifying dynasty and kingdom, and God's fatherly blessing on all Abram's descendants (the family of God). All three promises were shortly upgraded to covenant status in three separate encounters. All three covenants were gradually fulfilled in the next three major periods of salvation history: Abram's seed received its national land through the Mosaic covenant, became a kingdom through the Davidic covenant, and *the* source of blessing through Jesus and the New Covenant.

God's orders did not start out to be fun and games. Abram was welcomed to Canaan by a famine, so he packed up and went to Egypt. But he abused his wife by allowing her to be taken into Pharaoh's harem, which caused several plagues. He eventually left wealthy. Returning to Canaan, his nephew Lot feuded with him, and a war broke out in Canaan which Abram won. The mysterious priest, Melchizedek, king of Salem (later Jeru-Salem), offered bread and wine and a blessing, and Abram gave him a tithe. But Abram still had no heir.

God continued to test Abraham by stretching his faith awhile, and Hagar stretched Sarai's patience (along with bearing Abram's son Ishmael, the father of the Arabs). God, in making the next covenant, changed Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah, and gave them Isaac. Due to Sarah's jealousy, Ishmael and Isaac were separated and enmity flared up between them. After this, God tested Abraham again by demanding the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, only relieving him at the last moment. The Lord provided a lamb for the sacrifice at the last minute. Abraham could now be confident that the Lord would continue to provide. The Hebrew word for provide is "jira", the same site as Jeru-Salem, where the Temple would later be built by Solomon. God blesses people in a strange way: by heaping hardships upon them, making them poorer and weaker until they have to completely rely upon Him. The establishment of the Catholic Church must be attributed to God's faithfulness, for it represents the historic fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham.

Chapter 6: "THE ELDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER!" Firstborn Failures and Family Feuds

God the Father kept all His promises throughout the soap opera of the rest of Genesis. Jacob and his mother tricked Isaac into giving him Esau's blessing, and again God passed over the older son to continue His blessing through a worthier younger brother. But why the treachery from Jacob? Esau had once sold his birthright. Aware of Esau's anger, Jacob fled and lived seven years with Laban in order to marry his daughter Rachel. The trickster gets tricked, and has to work an additional seven years and marries both Rachel and her sister Leah. He loved Rachel more, but God favors the underdog, and Leah had four sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah) who would become patriarchs of the four most prominent tribes of Israel. Rachel became desperate and destroyed her family by bringing in a concubine. Bilhah had Dan and Naphtali, a second concubine had Gad and Asher, Leah had Issachar and Zebulun. Finally, Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin. These twelve headed the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob met and wrestled with an angel on his way to reunite with Esau.

Joseph was Israel's (Jacob's) favorite son, and his half-brothers found every excuse to hate him. They tossed him into a pit and sold him to a caravan of traders, Reuben alone protecting him from the bloodthirstiness of the others. But the Father can, and will again, turn betrayal to good. Joseph, in captivity, is repaid for his uprightness by being tossed in the Pharaoh's prison. Again, an evil deed will come to good. Through the Lord's help, Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and rises rapidly, taking a highborn wife. He saves his family during their time of famine, and all come to live with him in Egypt. God's family is traveling all over the Middle East, from Ur to Canaan to Ur to Canaan to Egypt. Genesis ends with Israel's deathbed. The Father had kept His promises all through Genesis, though the flawed human players had done everything they could to aggravate him. Rather than quickly solve everything, however, God's timetable proves different again from our own.

Chapter 7: "LET MY PEOPLE GO!" Israel's Exodus From Egypt

The descendants of Israel were fruitful and multiplied in Egypt, until they were cruelly imprisoned by a new Pharaoh who no longer honored his ancestor's agreements with Joseph. This Pharaoh even ordered his midwives to kill all of the Hebrew male children at birth (which they refused to do under clever dodges, being rewarded by God). In the midst of these horrid trials, Moses was born and basketed and found by Pharaoh's daughter, grew up, and fled, rejected by the Israelites and hunted by the Egyptians. Moses hid in the desert in Midian with Jethro and his seven daughters, marrying Zipporah.

Moses found God at the burning bush. God, to identify himself, made a quick run-down of salvation history by naming the prominent members of his family. He asked Moses to take his people out of Egypt in order to sacrifice to the Lord on Mount Horeb. Pharaoh did not agree, and God upped the stakes in order to remove His people altogether. Moses did his best to get out of the mission, even after witnessing God's power and miracles, so God finally gave him the aid of his brother Aaron. God dictated messages to Pharaoh that resonate with covenant language of family and commitment. His plan was to raise up Israel as a royal priest to serve all other nations if only the nations would cooperate.

But Moses didn't keep the circumcision covenant in order not to offend his father-in-law Jethro, but he did offend his Father God. God would have acted very severely had Zipporah not quickly circumcised their son. In other words, both had the knowledge of the covenant and originally chose not to follow it. Zipporah's response averted disaster for God's family.

The plagues followed quickly due to Pharaoh's hard heart, even though the Israelites did not believe Moses. God remained faithful anyway. Each plague had a special significance, displaying the "slaying" of a pagan Egyptian god by God. The Passover, the climax of the plagues, included some interesting and special instructions for his family: "Take a lamb without broken bones. Slay it and sprinkle its blood on the doorpost. That night, eat the lamb." Pharaoh finally let the Israelites go, but changed his mind almost immediately and chased them with his army. God the Father saved His people at the Red Sea, and they had seen His mighty power over and over.

After just three days across the Red Sea, however, the Israelites murmured against Moses because they could not find water. After six weeks, they could not find food. No faith or gratitude was forthcoming, but nonetheless, the Father provided manna on the ground and quails every evening and water when needed. The Father patiently lifted His people up and carried them farther and farther. His goal was to make His people reliant on Him alone.

Chapter 8: ISRAEL'S CALF-HEARTED RESPONSE: The Mosaic Covenant at Mount Sinai

Israel came to Sinai after three months, and God declared His intention to transform them into a kingdom of priests. The Ten Commandments gave the hodgepodge tribes a common identity. God planned to manifest Himself to the people in order to establish an intimate relationship with His priest-sons, but He chose to prepare them first by having them consecrate themselves, wash their clothes, and abstain from relations for three days. But evidently most of the Israelites failed these simple commands, and they asked Moses, in fear, to speak to the Lord alone. The next four chapters of Exodus are laws to govern relationships, and then we get to the Sinai covenant, so the covenant is one of family life. Moses and seventy-three elders also ate and drank before the Lord: a covenant meal, similar to Jesus' meal which signifies the New Covenant.

Moses again ascended the mountain and fasted for forty days and nights, during which the Father gave specific instructions such as Aaron's position and the building of the ark, tabernacle, and altar. But at the bottom of the mountain, the people said that Moses (not God!), who brought them from Egypt, had disappeared and they now had license to act as they want. Aaron was too weak to argue. The golden calf appeared, and with it all forms of immorality: a total betrayal of God the Father. God was understandably upset, and threatened to disown His people because of their broken covenant. Moses, interestingly, negotiated on Israel's behalf, a Christ-like mediator. It was God who instigated this change in Moses in the first place, so that he could mediate on behalf of God's eldest nation whom He loved and who needed a mediator! Moses identified himself completely with Israel, but by doing this with a sinful nation, he became sinful by juxtaposition and lost certain privileges with God. But yet the Lord compensated him for these losses, and allowed him revelations of divine glory.

The Levites assumed Israelite priesthood after they were the only ones to repudiate the golden calf. Moses used them on his side when he descended the mountain and grew furious at his brethren's behavior. The Levites slew about three thousand Israelite kinsmen in their anger. The other tribes were "defrocked" when they repudiated their priesthood. The Levites administered the curse under which Israel put itself when it broke the covenant. The Levites were commanded by God to offer daily sacrifice of animals (the first of its kind in Israel) on behalf of the other tribes, a constant reminder of how near Israel always is to rejecting God. But to renounce idolatry is not the same as to remove sin, or to replace it with righteousness. Only after the self-sacrifice of Jesus could the sacrifice of animals stop.

Chapter 9: BELOVED BACKSLIDERS: Israel in the Wilderness

After leaving Sinai, Israel wandered around the desert because of their revolutionary spirit of dissent: first Aaron and Miriam, then twelve chief princes, then the people. After forty years, the old generation had died off but had managed to pass on many of their bad habits to their young, although Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and the Levites had done their best to educate the Israelites. God put this second generation to the test at the border of the Promised Land with the mercenary prophet Balaam, and Israel fell into idol worship.

Deuteronomy, the last and deepest of the books of Moses, served as the covenant rule and national constitution for Israel. There were many instances, however, of concessionary laws (such as divorce and remarriage, polygamy, and concubines) due to Israel's past hardheartedness. God made an enormous promise: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart." This means that God would cut Israel off at the heart from sin: divine heart surgery. Deuteronomy was the prescribed regimen to isolate the patient from other infections until it could come to its senses (but later events would show that a whole "new heart" would be needed). The similarities between Moses and Jesus are deep and numerous, from birth to 40 days or years in the wilderness to 12 disciple tribes to Passover death.

Chapter 10: "CHOOSE THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE!" From Conquest to Kingdom

Joshua began his leadership of the Israelites by following God's instructions and conquering much of the Promised Land (but did not destroy all that God had instructed him to). Even worse, the Israelites soon began to intermarry with the Canaanites. At the end of his life, Joshua tried to bring the people back to the covenant, but did not completely succeed. It was now the turn of the Judges, of one crisis after another: sin, slavery, supplication, salvation, and surplus. The corruption of the Levites (such as Eli) and the shortcomings of the Judges (like Samson) ended the cycle. Samuel, the Lord's prophet, gave the people a king over his and the Lord's misgivings. God's plan was to make an earthly model of His heavenly throne and temple. Moses had once given a warning to hedge in future monarchs: a prohibition against taking "for himself" weapons, wives, and wealth; this warning was completely disregarded by the monarchs.

Saul was anointed as king by Samuel, but Saul eventually acted like a priest out of turn. God punished him by taking away his dynastic ambitions, and transferred the mantle of power to David. In a stroke of divine irony, Saul's son Jonathan became bosom friends with David and the two swore a personal covenant of family friendship. David several times could have killed Saul, but bided his time until the Lord himself gave him the throne upon Saul and Jonathan's death.

Chapter 11: "THOU ART THE MAN!" From Kingdom to Exile

David reigned for forty years, his highest achievement being the capture of Jerusalem, with all its historical, political, and military significances, and then transferring the Ark of the Covenant to the city. David, unlike Saul, is able to act as much a priest as a king. David wanted to build the Lord a temple, but God responded by promising David a house instead (which could have meant a family, building, temple, or dynasty, or all four). Solomon was the son of this promise, fulfilling all four meanings. David did announce a greater covenant blessing than God had ever given before, a "Torah" (charter of divine guidance) for all nations. David thus transformed the national family of Israel into an imperial family. David's Psalms also leave us glimpses into the covenant, which will be fulfilled by the Son of David, Jesus.

But for all David's promise, his weakness (women) would be his downfall, leading him to adultery and murder. The covenant curse thus served upon him also visited his descendants: Amnon raped his sister, Absalom killed Amnon and revolted against David, a power struggle developed, et cetera. Solomon had great wisdom, but systematically violated all three rules of Deuteronomy's "law of the king": he was a tyrant, collected an incredible amount of weaponry and money, and was far too amorous. He even fell into idolatry, but the Father began to take away his kingdom. The following kings made increasingly unfortunate decisions, resulting in the division of Israel and spiritual rebellion of the larger kingdom. The bleak times climaxed with the deportation of the Jews by Babylon in 586 B.C. After being allowed to return by Cyrus, temple worship resumed, and the Jews waited for the Lord without kings or prophets. The purification of the Jews came in the crucible of intense suffering, and they now saw themselves as living sacrifices and the world as one immense altar.

Chapter 12: "IT IS FINISHED!" The Son Fulfills the Father's Promises

Jesus Christ is Priest, Prophet, and King: the new Adam, the seed of Abraham, the new Moses, the Son of David, the Son of God, and the Lamb of God. What did Jesus mean when He said, on the cross, "It is finished"? What is *it*? The Passover which Jesus began, but was interrupted, in the Upper Room the night before! Its completion was marked by the sign of Jesus' drinking the sour wine, the "fourth cup". Jesus completed the fulfillment of the Passover of the Old Covenant by transforming it into the New Covenant Passover. Hahn came to this startling conclusion through a long process of discovery, looking closely at the Old Covenant and Passover background, the first-century Jewish Passover, the "cup" in the garden of Gethsemane, and the irony in the Gospel of John (wherein Jesus' paschal suffering is actually the event whereupon He manifests and enters into His kingdom's glory).

The Eucharist, then, is a sacrifice! Jesus clearly institutes the Eucharist within the Jewish Passover; the Jewish Passover was the covenant sacrifice that Jesus meant to fulfill by His own self-offering; the Passover sacrifice ought not to be separated from Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; the Eucharist is thus inseparably linked to Jesus' death: they are the same sacrifice. Humorously, this line of thought was recorded separately by Hahn and the *Baltimore Catechism*. Jesus' earlier discourses on the Eucharist (in John 6) make clear His own teachings on the power and sacrifice of the Eucharist. The full end of the Passover sacrifice was the eating of the lamb: the main purpose of the sacrifice was communion. Paul understood that the sacrifice was not the end of it, but that more is to be done. In a different way, the sacrifice is never-ending.

To recap in ten steps: 1) God is more than Creator, He is Father; 2) God established a covenant in the beginning; 3) all of us have broken God's covenant; 4) we desperately need God's mercy and grace; 5) the solution to sin came with Jesus Christ; 6) Jesus seals the New Covenant with His self-sacrifice; 7) Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit, which is also His gift to us; 8) Jesus had instituted the sacraments; 9) the Catholic Church is God's family, established by Jesus through the Spirit; 10) as God's children, we are earthly pilgrims heading home to heaven

Chapter 13: HERE COMES THE BRIDE: The Son Rises Over the New Jerusalem

This chapter considers how Christ views the Church by examining biblical imagery (bride, city, body, and temple). The Book of Revelation is chock-full of these images in the eternal liturgy. All creation finds a place in the liturgy of the cosmic temple, indeed, the very being of creation worships God. The world was created to be a sacrament, pointing to the reality of God. Our bodies and souls, too, are designed to be completely given over in worship, since we are now priests. The Mass ushers us into the presence of the Father and the Lamb, and worship alongside the saints and myriads of angels.

The Church is regularly referred to as the Bride of Christ, in Paul and John. Parallels can be found between Christ and the Church with Adam and Eve, as well as other nuptial signs. In the Old Testament, the bride (Israel) played the harlot and the Lord had to cast her off (without abandoning her). Revelation is the fulfillment of God's promises. The Church is the New Jerusalem. God's plan was in three phases: the Old Covenant was promise; the New Covenant is fulfillment; eternity will be consummation. In the New Jerusalem, John tells us that there is no temple, because the temple is no longer an impersonal building but the Lamb, the Eucharistic sacrifice. Though when we see the Church, we often see the sinners, this Church is a Church of saints.